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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 GENEVA 000034

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SPECIAL ENVOY SADA CUMBER
STATE PASS TO USAID

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/15/2019

TAGS: PREL KISL EAID OIC SA

SUBJECT: SADA CUMBER'S FAREWELL CALL ON OIC SECRETARY
GENERAL IHSANOGLU

REF: CASSAYRE-MENARD EMAIL 1/11/09

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Classified By: DCM Mark C. Storella, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Sada Cumber paid a farewell call on OIC Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu on January 11 in Geneva. The two agreed to work swiftly on the details of USG-OIC cooperation on maternal and infant mortality. They discussed the possibilities for the OIC to obtain a diplomatic presence in the U.S. Ihsanoglu lamented the "human tragedy" unfolding in Gaza, expressed concern that America's image was in decline, and reaffirmed his goal for the OIC -- "moderation and modernization" -- for which he sought U.S. support. SE Cumber encouraged a skeptical Ihsanoglu to present the Vatican with specific ideas on how they OIC and the Vatican could mend Catholic-Muslim relations. End Summary.

OIC-USG Cooperation through USAID

¶2. (U) Ihsanoglu expressed his keen interest in developing the details of OIC-USG cooperation through the recently signed Cooperation Framework with USAID on maternal and infant mortality. Per reftel, he requested holding the planned teleconference between USG and OIC officials at the earliest possible date, and before SE Cumber's departure.

¶3. (U) Ihsanoglu requested SE Cumber's assistance for the OIC to build a relationship with the United States Institute of Peace and confirmed that Malaysian Foreign Minister Rais Yatim had agreed to this approach.

An OIC Diplomatic Presence in the U.S.?

¶4. (SBU) SE Cumber informed Ihsanoglu that two mechanisms exist for the OIC to establish a diplomatic presence in the U.S.: an Act of Congress or a Presidential directive. An Act of Congress was a long and difficult process, explained SE Cumber; however, a Presidential directive could be delivered swiftly were the decision made to recognize the OIC. SE Cumber said he had discussed this idea with the Obama Transition Team. Separately, SE Cumber encouraged the OIC to consider using a lobbying firm in the U.S. to help promote

its issues and package its message in the most effective way.

SE Cumber encouraged the OIC to learn from other countries such as Israel or India, who have been very effective in making their cases in the U.S.

On Gaza, the U.S., and the OIC

¶ 15. (SBU) Ihsanoglu lamented that there was a "gap in confidence" between the U.S. and the Muslim world. He said he hoped the new U.S. Administration would work hard to repair an image that, in his personal view, had sunk in the past decade. He suggested that the best way to address those relations was through senior contacts between the USG and the OIC, which, he repeated, represented 56 countries. Ihsanoglu reaffirmed his mission for the OIC was "moderation and modernization." He recognized that not all OIC members wanted to move as quickly as he, but stressed that the OIC needed the United States to help with modernization in particular. "Without modernization, there will be no moderation," he concluded. He welcomed the opportunity to work closely with the new Administration.

¶ 16. (SBU) Without a solution of the Palestinian issue, stated Ihsaoglu, there will always be radicalism. The current situation in Gaza, he said, "is a human tragedy." You cannot compare homemade rockets to the Israeli bombings and use of phosphorous munitions, he argued, but added that "Hamas started this mess and they are stupid." SE Cumber shared the view that the situation was tragic and noted that an increasing number of outlets and editorials in the U.S. were echoing that point.

OIC Still Skeptical About Relations with the Vatican

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¶ 17. (C) Ihsanoglu posited that one of the major challenges facing the Muslim world was poor relations between Catholicism and Islam. He dismissed "interfaith dialogue" (including the Saudi King's November 2008 dialogue at the UNGA) as a means of addressing the issue and suggested that the OIC and the Vatican needed to improve relations at a senior level. Ihsanoglu "did not take seriously" the recent Vatican offer for him to meet with a lower level official to discuss issues. SE Cumber briefed Ihsanoglu on Cumber's recent meeting with Pope Benedict XVI and encouraged the OIC to submit a paper to the Vatican charting out a path to improve Catholicism-Islam relations. A skeptical Ihsanoglu said he would consider it.

¶ 18. (U) Special Envoy Sada Cumber cleared this telegram.
TICHENOR